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PTQ1791

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D)

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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00
	CTME-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DOTE-00	PERC-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	EXIM-01	E-00	FAAE-00	VC-00	FRB-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00	CAC-00	VCE-00
	AC-01	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	OCS-03	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00
	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	STR-00	USIE-00	ASDS-00	EPAE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00
	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/013W	

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O 162017Z DEC 02
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9068
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 004033

TREASURY FOR OASIA/INL - AARON JONES
NSC FOR LLORENS
USCINSO ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2012
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TAGS: PGOV, ASEC, CASC, ECON, PREL, OAS, VE
SUBJECT: POLITICAL UPDATE, DECEMBER 16, 2002, 1600 HOURS
LOCAL

REF: CARACAS 03967 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM FREDERICK B. COOK FOR REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

-- (U) OPPOSITION PROTEST STOPPED TRAFFIC ON MAJOR HIGHWAYS
IN EASTERN CARACAS THIS MORNING. VARIOUS POLICE FORCES

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DISPERSED SEVERAL GROUPS WITH TEAR GAS. PRESS REPORTS NOTE 5 PEOPLE WERE INJURED, INCLUDING ONE BY SHOT-GUN PELLETS. TELEVISION VIDEO CREWS BROADCAST FOOTAGE OF POLICE FIRING SHOTGUNS INTO THE AIR NEAR APARTMENT BUILDINGS TO DISPERSE PROTESTERS.

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-- (U) SOUND BITES: WAR OF WORDS CONTINUES ON TV.

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END SUMMARY.

TRAFFIC DISRUPTION DEMONSTRATION ENDS;
LARGELY PEACEFUL

(U) THE MORNING DEMONSTRATIONS CALLED TO DISRUPT STREET TRAFFIC ENDED AROUND MID-DAY DECEMBER 16 AS SCHEDULED. OPPOSITION PROTESTORS WERE GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL STOPPING TRAFFIC ON MAJOR HIGHWAYS IN EASTERN CARACAS. SEVERAL EMBOFFS, INCLUDING THE AMBASSADOR WERE SLOWED, FORCED TO TAKE ALTERNATE ROUTES OR TALK THEIR WAY THROUGH ROAD BLOCKS AS THEY TRIED TO MAKE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE CITY. IN SEVERAL INSTANCES, PROTESTORS LEFT DEBRIS SUCH AS ROCKS ON THE HIGHWAYS TO BLOCK VEHICLES. THERE WERE INCIDENTS OF ROCK-THROWING AT PASSING CARS, AND VARIOUS POLICE FORCES DISPERSED SEVERAL GROUPS USING TEAR GAS CANISTERS IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON. PRESS REPORTS NOTE 5 PEOPLE WERE INJURED, INCLUDING ONE BY SHOT-GUN PELLETS. TELEVISION VIDEO CREWS BROADCAST FOOTAGE OF POLICE FIRING SHOTGUNS INTO THE AIR IN THE LAS PALMAS SECTION OF EASTERN CARACAS (NEAR THE

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AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE) IN EFFORTS TO DISPURSE THE
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PROTESTERS. AT THIS TIME, TRAFFIC APPEARS TO BE FLOWING
NORMALLY, WITH OPPOSITION PROTESTS LIMITED TO THE ALTAMIRA
AREA OF THE CITY, THE CENTER OF OPPOSITION ACTIVITY FOR THE
PAST MONTH.

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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00
	CTME-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DOTE-00	PERC-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	EXIM-01	E-00	FAAE-00	VC-00	FRB-00	H-01
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	SS-00	STR-00	USIE-00	ASDS-00	EPAE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00
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SOUND BITES: WAR OF WORDS CONTINUES ON TV

(U) OPPOSITION TELEVISION SPOTS SOUND THE DOUBLE MESSAGE OF CALLING CHAVEZ A FAILURE AND PROPOSING THAT HE RESIGN. IN ONE SPOT BY THE COORDINADORA DEMOCRATICA, THE SCREEN SHOWS THE WORDS "HISTORY OF A FAILURE." IT SHOWS ILLUSTRATIVE SCENES AND THEN A STAMP APPEARS THAT SAYS "FAILURE." THE TEXT INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING LITANY:

IN THE 1992 COUP -- HE FAILED; IN GOVERNING -- HE FAILED; IN TAKING CARE OF THE STREET KIDS -- HE FAILED; IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION -- HE FAILED; IN PROVIDING JUSTICE -- HE FAILED; IN HEALTH -- HE FAILED
IN EDUCATION -- HE FAILED; IN UNEMPLOYMENT -- HE FAILED; IN THE ECONOMY -- HE FAILED; AFTER FOUR YEARS OF GOVERNING -- HE FAILED.

(U) ANOTHER OPPOSITION TV SPOT SHOWS FOOTAGE OF CHAVEZ WITH THE LITTLE GIRL AT MIRAFLORES WHO SAID SHE ASKED THE BABY JESUS FOR A SUITCASE FOR CHRISTMAS. THE CAPTIONS THEN SAY: "MR. PRESIDENT, THE SUITCASE IS FOR YOU TO LEAVE. RESIGN NOW. ELECTIONS NOW." IT IS SPONSORED BY THE CIVIL ALLIANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY (ALIANZA CIVICA DE LA SOCIEDAD CIVIL), WHICH IS HEADED BY ELIAS SANTANA. SANTANA IS COORDINATING MOST OF THE SPOTS FOR THE COORDINADORA DEMOCRATICA.

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PRO-CHAVEZ SPOTS ON GOVERNMENT TELEVISION SHOW MOTHERLY
VENEZUELAN WOMEN AND SMALL CHILDREN ESPOUSING THEIR LOVE FOR
CHAVEZ AND URGING HIM TO STAY ON.

REPORT FROM THE FIELD:
MERIDA SUFFERS DURING THE STRIKE

(U) THE DIRECTOR OF THE EMBASSY'S BI-NATIONAL CENTER IN
MERIDA REPORTS THAT THE CITY HAS SEEN DEMONSTRATIONS FROM
BOTH THE OPPOSITION AND CHAVISTA SIDE, AND SUPPLIES OF FOOD
AND GASOLINE ARE RUNNING LOW.

B1

GASOLINE IN MERIDA BECOMING SCARCE;
U.S. THREAT REFERENCED IN PAMPHLETS

(U) THE GAS SITUATION IN MERIDA IS PRECARIOUS. GASOLINE

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STATIONS ARE OPEN ONLY ABOUT FORTY PERCENT OF THE TIME, WITH LINES UP TO FOUR HOURS LONG. LEAD-FREE GASOLINE IS SCARCE. GOVERNMENT WORKERS WERE ABLE TO OPEN THE PDVSA DISTRIBUTION CENTER IN MERIDA, BUT MOST DOUBT THAT LOCAL SUPPLIES WILL LAST LONG WITHOUT ADDITIONAL DELIVERIES. THE LOCAL BOLIVARIAN CIRCLES ARE DISTRIBUTING LITERATURE STATING THAT THE U.S. HAS THE INTENT TO TAKE OVER THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY. SHAPIRO

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